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1963/02/28

28 February 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
The White House

I am returning the report of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board dated February 4th commenting on the intelligence community's actions in connection with the Cuban crisis. I will not attempt to comment on the specifics of the report. It is my understanding that the Board will make recommendations to you for corrective measures which they feel should be taken within the intelligence community. When these recommendations are received, I would hope for an opportunity to comment upon them as I did on the recommendations contained in their interim report of December 28th.

When I appeared before the Board on November 7th, December 9th, and December 28th, I stated that there was an understandable reluctance or timidity in programming U-2 overflights over Cuba after we had discovered the presence of surface-to-air missile installations. This caution was understandable not only because of the extremely severe criticism of "U-2 incidents" dating back to the Powers' incident on May 1, 1960, but also because of the more recent loss of a Chinat U-2 and a U-2 intrusion over Sakhalin in early September. This same attitude apparently dictated the Secretary of State's action in revising a CIA-proposed flight at the Special Group meeting held in Mr. Bundy's office on September 10th. It was, I believe, the same attitude that caused the Special Group in considering my request on October 4th for extensive Cuban reconnaissance to ask [redacted] JCS, and CIA to study all alternative means of conducting aerial reconnaissance and to report back on October 9th. In retrospect, it might be contended that there was a failure to exercise sufficient urgency in proposing U-2 reconnaissance missions; however, I am inclined to believe that any one reaching such a conclusion must first carefully weigh the serious considerations that enter into a decision to overfly denied territory.

I further advised the Board that I felt the analysts, both in the intelligence community and elsewhere in Government, including the

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State Department, were so convinced that the Soviets would not accept the inevitable confrontation resulting from placement of offensive missiles in Cuba, that they were inclined to dismiss such evidence as there was to the contrary. This, I find, is one of the difficulties of dealing with the imponderables of what the other fellow will or will not do. With particular reference to the Cuban situation, it should be noted that for two years the intelligence community had been surfeited with reports of "missiles in Cuba," all of which proved to be incorrect prior to those which we received on or about September 20th. Nevertheless, one can now readily conclude that greater emphasis should have been placed by the estimators on certain of the "Intelligence Indicators" attached as Annex A to the Board report. About 3,500 agent and refugee reports were analyzed in the preparation of my report to the Killian Board and of this number, only eight in retrospect were considered as reasonably valid indicators of the deployment of offensive missiles to Cuba.

I continue to feel that the intelligence community performed well. I have examined this performance personally and in depth, and incidentally with a critical eye. As you know, my own views differed from those of the community. I believe that the conclusions reached from my study made for the Board at your request reflect a more reasonable judgment of the performance of the intelligence community in the six months' period prior to the October crisis. A copy of these conclusions is attached.

John A. McCone
Director

Attachment

JAM:mfbb:bd (28 Feb 63)
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CONCLUSIONS

1. Although the intelligence community's inquiry into its actions during the Cuban crisis revealed certain areas where shortcomings existed and where improvements should be made in various areas of intelligence collection and processing, the intelligence community operated extensively and well in connection with Cuba. Every major weapons system introduced into Cuba by the Soviets was detected, identified, and reported (with respect to numbers, location and operational characteristics) before any one of these systems attained an operational capability.

2. A relatively short period of time ensued between the introduction of strategic weapons into Cuba, particularly strategic missiles, and the commencement of the flow, although meager, of tangible reports of their presence; detection of their possible presence and targeting of the suspect areas of their location was accomplished in a compressed time frame; and the intelligence cycle did move with extraordinary rapidity through the stages of collection, analysis, targeting for verification, and positive identification.

3. The very substantial effort directed toward Cuba was originated by an earlier concern with the situation in Cuba and the effort, already well under way, contributed to the detection and analysis of the Soviet build-up.

4. Information was disseminated and used.

5. Aerial photography was very effective and our best means of establishing hard intelligence.

6. The procedures adopted in September delayed photographic intelligence, but this delay was not critical, because photography obtained prior to about 17 October would not have been sufficient to warrant action of a type which would require support from Western Hemisphere NATO allies.

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7. Agent reports helped materially; however, none giving significant information on offensive missiles reached the intelligence community or policy-makers until after mid-September. When received, they were used in directing aerial photography.

8. Some restrictions were placed on dissemination of information, but there is no indication that these restrictions necessarily affected analytical work or actions by policy-makers.

9. The 19 September estimate, while indicating the improbability that the Soviet Union would place MRBM's and IRBM's in Cuba, did state that "this contingency must be examined carefully, even though it would run counter to current Soviet policy"; the estimators in preparing the 19 September estimate gave great weight to the philosophical argument concerning Soviet intentions and thus did not fully weigh the many indicators.

10. The estimate of 19 October on probable Soviet reactions was correct.

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